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## TANK AND BRADLEY MASTER GUNNERS TAKE ON 'ZERO-DEFECT' JOB

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**GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany** — Master gunners are the experts for two of the Army's premier heavy combat weapons systems -- the Abrams main battle tank and the Bradley armored fighting vehicle.

A master gunner needs to know everything about his machine and its arsenal, said Sgt. 1st Class Charles Elam of the 1st Squadron, 1st U.S. Cavalry of V Corps' 1st Armored Division, a master gunner since 1998.

A master gunner earns his pay during tank and Bradley gunnery, the annual live-fire field exercises where Soldiers qualify their machines' weapons systems.

"This is the master gunner's world," said Elam during the unit's recent month-long gunnery exercise here. "The commander is responsible for what happens at gunnery, but the master gunners are responsible for executing it."

Master gunners train crews on their vehicle's capabilities, especially if the Soldiers are new and have never been through gunnery.

"That's what it's all about," said Elam, "watching a crew go from being brand-new to qualifying the first time. Knowing you twisted and molded them to get to that point, nothing else matters to me."

Elam said master gunners are technical advisors on the training field, but they are also key players on the battlefield.

"They advise the commander on what the vehicles are capable of doing and what the enemy's capabilities are against you," Elam said.

With a responsibility like that, Elam said, being a master gunner "is a zero-defect job." While many Army schools require a 70 percent grade point average to pass, master gunner course students must maintain 90 percent proficiency, he explained.

Generally, there are two types of master gunners, explained Elam. Bradley master gunners are usually infantry or cavalry Soldiers whose training takes place at Fort Benning, Ga. Tank master gunners attend courses at Fort Knox, Ky.

The three-month courses teach subjects such as creating gunnery plans, training crews and vehicle capabilities. To enroll in the course, Soldiers must be at least staff sergeants and prove they have knowledge of the tank or Bradley, said Elam.

"The school is a lot of grueling exams," he said. "It's a great job, but you have to have the heart to want it."

